



State of Wisconsin

Department of Public Instruction

Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster Written Testimony to The Commission on The No Child Left Behind Act

Good morning, Governor Barnes and Secretary/Governor Thompson. Thank you and the full commission for this opportunity to testify. I am honored to serve as the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for Wisconsin.

Throughout our state over the last five years, we have made a New Wisconsin Promise to ensure a quality education for all our children. A New Wisconsin Promise founded upon the proud history, in our state, of educational leadership and innovation. Like never before, our state has united on an educational mission: raising the achievement of all students and closing the achievement gap between economically disadvantaged students, students of color, and their peers.

Not only is closing the gap in achievement a moral imperative, it makes the most sense economically. Because the gap in achievement of our children is directly related to their economic disadvantage, we must develop the most efficient, effective, and fiscally sound response to children and families of poverty our state has ever seen.

The principles of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of implementing high-quality state assessments, establishing accountability for results at the school and district level, ensuring highly qualified teachers are in every classroom, and public reporting of results are sound principles for improving education which our New Wisconsin Promise reflects. However, the prescriptive nature in which those principles are delineated in the federal law has taken the sovereignty of public education from state and local school districts. Ensuring state and local control within the existing federal law and making critical changes through reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) can ensure the values and principles on which

the law was built remain, but return the responsibility of ensuring a quality education system for all children back to state and local officials.

I travel to every corner of our state, and I am invigorated by the dedication I see to the children of Wisconsin. Communities understand that closing the achievement gap must be our number-one priority, that the academic success of all students is not just an education issue. It is a social justice issue, an economic development issue, an issue of morality.

While citizens throughout our state do not all agree with the provisions and requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, they do understand Wisconsin's history, our tradition of equity and investing in all our children, and the promise of a bright future through quality education.

From our country's first kindergarten, to nation-leading performance on college admissions tests and high graduation rates, to a truly world-class system of higher education and public libraries, our state has always prided itself on our educational system.

In Wisconsin, we know the importance of public education and libraries to the economic future of every community. And, in Wisconsin, we recognize the value of our high quality of life sustained by our involved, active citizenry.

Our greatest educational asset rests in our shared responsibility and commitment at the local level to provide a quality public education. From Two Rivers to Tomah, Elroy to Elmbrook, our strength rests in the power of our local, publicly elected school boards. Our strong schools are a result of decisions made by those closest to students in classrooms; by parents, educators, and community leaders.

To focus our work on closing the achievement gap, we re-organized the Department of Public Instruction around the New Wisconsin Promise – with a division each for reading and student achievement; learning support: equity and advocacy; academic excellence; libraries, technology, and community learning; and finance and management. We focus on parental and community involvement in educational choices. Our management style is one of collaborative decision-making using numerous stakeholder groups, representatives of business, labor, community-based organizations, and PK-16 education.

Through our New Wisconsin Promise to raise the achievement of all students and close the achievement gap, we are working to:

- ensure quality teachers in every classroom and strong leadership in every school;
- improve all student achievement with a focus on reading and a balanced literacy standard that has all students reading at or above grade level;
- invest in early learning opportunities through four-year-old kindergarten, the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) class-size reduction program (an effective program started during Governor Thompson's administration), and collaborative public/private approaches to early learning;
- increase parental and community involvement in our schools and libraries to address teenage literacy, dropouts, and truancy;
- incorporate technology as a tool to enhance academic achievement;
- provide effective pupil services, special education, and prevention programs;
- provide before- and after-school programs and health and nutrition programs that bring resources together to support families; and
- provide career and technical education as a comprehensive strategy to engage students in becoming active citizens by better understanding their role in the family, society, and world of work.

While Wisconsin works to fulfill our promise of quality education, we also work to ensure that new federal requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act do not restrain us from the best practices, methodology, and assessment that have had proven results in Wisconsin. We do not want to fall into the trap of focusing on leaving no child untested. We take seriously our responsibility to ensure that we truly leave no child behind.

Because of our history of a strong public education system, our citizens expect more than teachers teaching to a standardized test or over-emphasizing standardized testing in assessing

student success. Citizens expect more than just good test scores. Wisconsin citizens expect that this generation will have the knowledge and skills to compete in a global economy.

In Wisconsin, we embrace accountability. We hold our public schools accountable for instilling and developing in our students a love of knowledge and learning, the ability to think critically, employ analytical and technical skills, to take pride in accomplishment, and to understand the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a democracy. Educating and developing civically engaged youth resonates as much in Milwaukee as it does in rural Phelps, Wisconsin, with a school district of 164 students.

We believe the more youth are engaged and involved in their learning, the better they will learn, and the more likely they are to complete their schooling. That is why service-learning, music, arts, sciences, physical education, and all extracurricular opportunities have long been recognized as major contributors in improving overall student achievement.

This school year, funding under the No Child Left Behind Act represents approximately 3% of all federal, state, and local funds spent on education. Under NCLB, Wisconsin received nearly 300 million dollars in 2004-05 to serve 426 school districts. The total amount of state and local revenue for education was approximately 9 billion dollars in 2004-05 with approximately 60% from state aids and credits, and 40% from local property taxes and other revenues.

While federal funding is a small percentage of what we invest in educating Wisconsin's children, the requirements of NCLB have had a significant financial impact on our educational system. During the current school year, 2005-06, we implemented all the federal testing required beyond our state law. We now test more than half our public school students, over 445,000 students every year. It has been expensive to develop new standardized tests and reporting systems at a time of unprecedented state budget deficits.

Federal law, also, set forth new requirements for highly qualified teachers. Wisconsin has always had high standards, set by state law, for educators and the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has ensured these standards are met through program approval of all institutions licensing educators. Wisconsin's reform of educator licensing and certification (PI 34) developed prior to NCLB, ensures that our educators who graduate after August 2004 are highly qualified. And, again this year, we are a national leader in putting highly qualified

educators into our schools. However, we are fearful that the prescriptive nature of NCLB will require us to dismantle this extensive education reform which was collaboratively built under the Governor Thompson administration.

The federal law requires local districts and the state to report more disaggregated data than ever before. In order to meet these requirements, all students in the state were assigned a student identification number that will allow us to disaggregate data based on all the required subgroups and to track students as they move from district to district. This system was developed with student privacy as the number-one value to be maintained. We support the disaggregation of student data to drive informed decision-making. However, federal funding has been insufficient to support this new data system and our state can't afford it over the long term.

Recognizing that the requirements under this law are very complex, the Department of Public Instruction has conducted countless workshops and training on the requirements of the law. We publish an extensive bulletin series, educator and parent toolkits, and other documents, available on our website, on the requirements of the law to assist in understanding how the requirements specifically impact Wisconsin's schools and districts. Our school districts have done an excellent job in implementing this very complicated law.

To date, by focusing on the effective strategies and educational reforms of our New Wisconsin Promise, communities have been coming together around our shared value and responsibility of raising student achievement and closing the achievement gap – the intent of the NCLB Act. Over half of our school districts offer four-year-old kindergarten. Third grade reading scores in Milwaukee have never been higher. Statewide, 144 schools with 50 percent or greater free and reduced lunch students were above the state average in reading and math.

Communities are coming together in understanding the on-going, incremental, sustained effort that will be required to close the achievement gap. Citizens are understanding the economic impact of our failure to educate this generation to be productive citizens.

As with all education reform efforts, credibility with the public is critical. The NCLB Act will only be effective if the accountability system, which identifies schools for improvement, has credibility at the local level.

Moreover – because of the requirements and implementation of the AYP provision – the number of schools not achieving AYP will grow significantly each year due to a static prescriptive model of accountability that does not adequately recognize growth from one year to the next. This could lead communities to question the credibility of a flawed formula for educational progress under the federal law.

I met personally with leaders of schools identified for improvement and discussed their needs and education programs. Up to now communities have taken seriously our top priority of the New Wisconsin Promise to ensure that all children receive a quality education. However, we have to ensure an accountability model that accurately identifies schools for improvement and allows the state to prioritize resources to our neediest schools and districts. Since the inception of No Child Left Behind, Wisconsin has identified 96 schools for improvement. Of these, 42 have been at Level 1, 30 at Level 2, 15 at Level 3, 7 at Level 4, and 2 at Level 5.

We have worked closely with these schools and their district staff to help them implement the sanctions the NCLB Act requires. At a time when these schools are struggling to close an achievement gap, we hear from their communities that the federal sanctions are counterproductive or irrelevant to improvement.

Since the NCLB Act, schools identified for improvement have been portrayed as “failing” schools condemning the entire school and system. In fact, there may be a finite problem that will take time to correct. And, while working to improve, NCLB fails to give that school credit for any improvement other than meeting a static bar. Every school has room to improve and some have extreme needs, but we all know how difficult it can be to shake a label once it has been applied.

We hear that communities agree with the principle of parents having access to additional learning supports for their children who struggle, but prescribing what those supports must be in every community from a federal perspective does not honor state sovereignty and local control in public education.

Districts with Title I schools identified for improvement at Level 1, must offer intra-district school choice. In our small districts, intra-district school choice, as prescribed by the NCLB Act, is not an option as a district may have only one high school or middle school. In Milwaukee,

intra-district school choice is already an option for every parent in every MPS school. So, this federally mandated sanction is of limited relevance to our state.

In Wisconsin, we do have examples of Supplemental Educational Services (SES) providers that are doing a good job. But, we have watched providers struggle to pull together effective tutoring programs with no system of support to help and assure that they do a good job. NCLB threw open the door for any group to tutor students yet failed to provide a system of technical assistance and training for entities new to education. Because SES providers compete for enrollment, in some cases, parents are making choices based on incentives rather than educational quality. While many of these providers are sincerely concerned about youth in their communities, they don't have the expertise to succeed. Additionally, SES providers are not required to hire tutors that meet the school requirements for highly qualified teachers or paraprofessionals under the law to serve students. Moreover, SES providers can turn away students with special needs if they are not equipped to serve them. The SES sanctions are difficult to implement in rural areas where for-profit providers are hesitant to serve because it isn't financially lucrative. The law allows a variety of entities to apply to be SES providers regardless of quality, intention, or experience.

As you know, every district with Title I schools identified for improvement must set aside 20% of its Title I allocation to implement school choice or supplemental educational services regardless of the number of schools identified or the appropriateness of the sanction. NCLB requires schools to divert Title I funds from strategies that a local school board has determined are most effective in addressing students' academic needs to strategies that officials in Washington say are better. In fact, Washington officials have decided that the criteria for serving a student is one of economic need rather than academic need in direct contradiction to the way Title I services are delivered.

The administration of supplemental educational services has been a drain on our state and school districts. The Department of Public Instruction has had to redirect Title I staff responsibilities from assisting Title I schools in education program development to developing SES provider applications, reviewing applications, providing trainings and technical assistance to prospective and current providers, and developing provider reporting and monitoring systems. An estimated \$150,000 of Title I administration funds are redirected annually to support this federal mandate.

In Milwaukee, the district with the longest history of SES implementation, in addition to the approximately 9 million dollars that are set aside each year to pay for student participation in SES, the district has had to annually redirect over \$600,000 to establish SES enrollment, reimbursement, and monitoring systems. The combined set aside and administrative costs have resulted in reduced summer school opportunities for all children in the district, a reduction of central office staff time for serving schools, and jeopardized the quality of basic Title I programming.

Supporters of the federal formula of sanctions might argue that states have the opportunity to offset these costs to districts by allocating supplemental Title I funds to the districts. But what few understand is that these supplemental Title I dollars are taken from the percent increase other school districts might see in Title I basic funding. Therefore, in a state like ours, where Title I funding is declining, or when the federal government decides it must cut education funding, there are few districts that get an increase in Title I, reducing the supplemental dollars a state can tap. And even when there are supplemental funds available, it doesn't come close to replacing what the federal government has redirected.

For example, in 2005-06, districts with Title I schools identified for improvement had to set aside a total of over 10 million dollars for choice and supplemental educational services while the state of Wisconsin could only redirect 6 million dollars to support these schools. It's a formula that robs Peter to pay Paul, and, in the future, if funding continues to decline, could leave us without any dollars for school support just at the time that our number of schools identified for improvement dramatically increases. In a federal education bill that requires states, districts, and schools to implement improvements that are grounded in scientifically-based research, the research behind the prescribed sanctions is limited.

Wisconsin schools have taken seriously their identification for improvement. Wisconsin has a long history of public reporting of test data that pre-dates NCLB. Ask any of our school administrators about the scrutiny their schools experience when state test scores are released. As they should, the community closely examines that data and asks questions of their public school educators when local test scores don't compare favorably with neighboring districts. And schools have responded with strategies to improve that grew out of local conversations and local priorities. Now with NCLB, schools are faced with an additional layer of federal labels and

sanctions that undermines local control. When school boards, the community voice in public education, want to implement improvement strategies that make sense in their local context, many are faced with no funding to support them because the federal government has told them intra-district choice and supplemental educational services are better ideas.

I am a strong advocate of the principles of No Child Left Behind. I believe in parental choice and involvement, in quality teachers, in public reporting and accountability, but I strongly disagree that the federal government should determine a one size fits all solution to achieving these principles.

While focusing on the strategies of our New Wisconsin Promise, as delineated on page 3, to close the gap in achievement, the Department of Public Instruction is also implementing the following strategies to support improvement in schools identified for improvement (SIFI) under No Child Left Behind in a state-wide system of support:

1. We are prioritizing funding through discretionary grant programs across the agency.

Schools identified for improvement are given priority for funding in several discretionary grant programs, for example:

- Reading First serves 60 schools. This is an example of a federal program with the right intentions, supporting reading in our neediest schools. However, the prescriptive nature has made implementation difficult. We had to rewrite our state application four times before gaining approval of our state grant because of the prescriptive requirements of United States Department of Education (USDE). Many of our local school districts value a balanced literacy approach to teaching reading, and have not applied for Reading First grants due to the program's constraints.
- Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) grants went to 25 schools. This has been an especially effective program for authentic educational reform because it allowed local educators and parents to determine the strategies that would improve achievement. Unfortunately, federal funding and the program have been eliminated.

- Community Learning Centers (CLC) grants were awarded to 41 school districts. This is a great idea for expanding learning opportunities and certainly would make a better option for schools identified for improvement than supplemental educational services. This program should be increased.

2. We have allocated additional Title I funds.

Districts with schools identified for improvement are awarded supplemental Title I funds to support district level improvement efforts, as well as building level improvement efforts. Currently, every district and school identified for improvement receives these funds, totaling approximately six million dollars statewide. Examples of strategies being implemented by schools and districts through use of these funds include, but are not limited to: after school, intersession, and summer school tutoring programs in reading and mathematics; curriculum development and alignment to Wisconsin model academic standards, particularly as it relates to reading instruction in middle and high schools; professional development for regular and special education staff to more effectively adapt instruction for the neediest students; development of benchmark assessments and data collection and analysis systems to monitor student progress; home visits to make connections with students' families and strengthen the home/school partnership; school-community partnerships to enhance efforts to decrease truancy and professional development for school leaders to build the capacity of principals and lead teachers.

3. Our Title I supplemental funds have supported the development of a truancy reduction model called The Alliance for Attendance.

Three districts with schools identified for improvement have been awarded funding to support the development of school and community-based strategies to promote student attendance and decrease truancy. The formation of these partnerships is facilitated by staff from the Department of Public Instruction. The districts involved are Milwaukee Public Schools, Menominee Indian, and Green Bay Area. Funding supports collaborative planning between school and community partners, greater outreach to students and their families, and strategies to strengthen student engagement and connectedness to school.

4. We formed a statewide High School Task Force.

Teachers, principals, and district and community leaders from Milwaukee, Racine, Beloit, Menominee Indian, and Madison school districts (districts that currently have SIFI) are among

the many PK-16 educators from across Wisconsin who are examining the strengths and needs of high schools. The Task Force is identifying strategies to raise achievement, close the achievement gap, and promote post-secondary success and citizenship for all students; embracing the strengths of our high schools and identifying where change is needed; examining new models of student learning and engagement; rethinking the roles and relationships that frame high schools; and advancing best practices which promote equity, quality, and accountability in the high school experience.

5. We created the Wisconsin Urban Schools Leadership Project from Wallace Foundation funding.

The Wallace Fellows are an integral part of a broader, three-year project to transform school leadership in Wisconsin and develop a state and national model for master administrator licensure. This project draws exemplary principals from Green Bay, Kenosha, Madison, Milwaukee, and Racine—our largest urban school districts—to learn together and identify leadership practices that improve student academic performance. As these principals work in their schools and districts to close the achievement gap and ensure a quality education for every child, their efforts to bolster school leadership and administrative practice will have an impact statewide.

The mid-career principals were nominated by district-level leaders to become Wallace Fellows because of their energy and commitment to the growth of their profession and because they have demonstrated that they know how to affect change. During the first portion of the project, the Wallace Fellows are working in both large and small groups to share their knowledge and experience of learning communities and explore ways to assess, plan, and improve learning communities in their schools. The Wallace Fellows will explore other elements of exemplary school leadership during the project, using data for school improvement and accountability. They will work on building instructional capacity, developing urban community engagement and partnerships, and focusing on moral and ethical leadership in urban schools.

Funded through a grant from the Wallace Foundation, the Wisconsin Urban Schools Leadership Project is a partnership among the foundation, fellows and their districts, the Department of Public Instruction, Office of the Governor, the Milwaukee Partnership Academy, and three universities: Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee, the University of Wisconsin-Madison,

and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. The higher education partners, along with the Department of Public Instruction, Milwaukee Partnership Academy, and the Wallace Fellows, will be shaping criteria related to the master principal's license and ensuring that the license reflects the unique aspects of being an urban principal. Certification at the master principal level will require a portfolio that contains evidence of leadership efforts that have resulted in measured improvements in student learning and mastery of the skills and attributes of a master principal.

6. We have developed an assessment of district effectiveness in supporting SIFI.

The Department of Public Instruction, in partnership with staff from each district with schools identified for improvement and Cooperative Educational Service Agencies, is developing an evaluation process to help districts evaluate the effectiveness of the services they target to SIFI. The evaluation consists of a self-study of district efforts in five areas: Vision, Values and Culture; Leadership and Governance; Decision Making and Accountability; Curriculum and Instruction; and Professional Development. Results of the self-study are reviewed and validated by exemplary educators from similar districts. Findings will be used to target future school improvement funding to the district's most effective support strategies. A bank of technical assistance providers will be assembled by the department to work with districts to strengthen their support strategies for SIFI. Districts currently involved in this initiative are Milwaukee Public Schools, Kenosha Unified, Madison, Beloit, Racine, Green Bay Area, and Menominee Indian.

7. We will implement a School 2 School Program.

The Department of Public Instruction is developing a school visitation program to allow staff from SIFI to observe staff in schools that have been successful in closing the achievement gap. Host schools are being selected based on demonstrated success in reading, mathematics, attendance and graduation rates of all students, including critical subgroups such as students with disabilities, English-language learners, and disadvantaged youth. The program will be launched statewide in the 2006-07 academic year.

7. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) Handbook.

The Department of Public Instruction has published an *Adequate Yearly Progress Handbook* for principals and teachers in schools that have missed AYP under the No Child Left Behind Act. It details critical strategies for improving student performance in reading, mathematics, test

participation and attendance/graduation. It also provides assistance to school leaders in interpreting and communicating AYP results to parents, community members, school board members, and school staff.

8. Adolescent Learning Toolkit.

Based on the *Adequate Yearly Progress Handbook*, an *Adolescent Learning Toolkit* has been created as a resource for classroom teachers which gives step-by-step, practical guidance for implementing classroom strategies that improve instruction for middle and high school students in reading and mathematics. Currently under development, the toolkit is being written by exemplary educators working in Wisconsin public schools. The toolkit will be available in August 2006, and will be disseminated to teachers in SIFI, along with staff development opportunities.

9. Our Enhancing Adolescent Literacy Initiative.

We use Supplemental Title I funding in Milwaukee Public Schools and the Central City Cyber School to strengthen literacy initiatives for students in grades 6-12. Funding will be used to support staff development, curriculum development, and the purchase of instructional materials.

The Department of Public Instruction, in partnership with the Educational Communications Board (ECB), is developing video and web-based professional development resources called the “*Into the Book Video Series*” that focus on improving reading instruction for comprehension at the third grade. Videos illustrate successful teaching strategies that promote reading comprehension while the web pages provide teacher and student resources.

In Wisconsin, we value parental public school choice, and established a system of open enrollment between school districts and intra-district school choice prior to NCLB. Our options for parents promote quality education, parental involvement, and local control.

These efforts to support our neediest schools are a result of our state’s focus on raising achievement for all students and closing the achievement gap through our New Wisconsin Promise. We believe that the days of our children should be better than our own. To ensure that promise, we need a national agenda that invests more in our thousands of poor children and reaches across the racial divide to build up a political dialogue based on lifting up all citizens, not dividing them against each other.

There are concerns throughout our state that NCLB should focus more on empowering local school districts and states in addressing the adverse effects of poverty in student achievement. We hear consistently from local school districts that the intent of NCLB is imperative, but that the law with its overly prescriptive accountability and sanctions and lack of adequate funding is threatening early childhood programs, world language study, and the arts, all programs which require significant resources, but aren't assessed under NCLB.

So what needs to change in the NCLB law? Our experience working through our participatory process to implement and adapt NCLB has provided much data and information from the field. Over the last several months, I have engaged in a participatory process to listen to and gather local voices on NCLB in Wisconsin. I am continuing this process over the next two months to hear from educators, parents, school, early childhood and community leaders, school board members, and many others.

We have heard and continue to hear ideas for improvements and changes that would make NCLB more effective at increasing achievement and closing the achievement gap. And, moreover, allow our state to better support and improve schools identified for improvement. In addition, as President-elect of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), I chair its national task force on NCLB reauthorization. The values coming out of that national task force are consistent with what I am hearing in Wisconsin.

Overall, I want to reiterate that the values and principles of closing the achievement gap ring true in Wisconsin, but that the prescriptive nature of NCLB hinders efforts by educators and local schools to raise all students' achievement and close the gap. I want to take the opportunity to delineate changes in the law that will maintain the values and principles on which this law is built, but honors local control and state sovereignty in education.

Testing and Public Reporting

Eliminate the prescribed grades in which standardized tests must be administered in states and allow states the flexibility to develop and implement high-quality state standardized assessments in reading and mathematics. Allow states to assess reading and mathematics at least once at the elementary, middle, and high school levels as is currently required under the law for science, and require these assessments to be part of a state's accountability model.

One of the hallmarks of NCLB is public reporting. New data collection requirements under NCLB have required states to develop new or maintain individual student record systems. These systems are critical to collecting and reporting required disaggregated data under NCLB. The implementation of these systems has put incredible fiscal and human restraints on state departments of education and local school districts. Public reporting and high-quality state assessment go hand-in-hand. Allowing states to determine which grades are assessed in reading and mathematics at the elementary, middle, and high school levels consistent with their accountability system will allow states to use current resources to ensure both high-quality state assessments and effective public reporting systems are in place.

Large-Scale State Assessments

The time spent on preparation for mandatory large-scale state assessments in reading and mathematics to hold schools accountable for students in grades 3-8 is having a negative impact on the ability of teachers to spend time on innovative and exciting approaches to instruction and assessment. In addition, schools are reporting a narrowing of the curriculum with less time available for such subjects as social studies, art, music, etc. Required large-scale state assessments have significant limitations over local ongoing authentic assessments that track student growth and help guide instruction and create logistical nightmares for schools trying to develop testing schedules that accommodate all the additional grades.

Large-scale state assessment provides a snapshot of a system (school/district) to provide information on how well it is doing at reaching selected achievement objectives. There is no scientific evidence that shows doing this type of assessment in multiple grades at each level (elementary, middle, high) provides any more information than once at each level. Large-scale assessment is not meant to provide formative information about individual student performance, which is best done locally.

For example, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is a large-scale assessment to take a snapshot of a state and of the nation. The main reading and mathematics assessments are done once every two years at grades 4 and 8, not at every grade level and not even every year. In addition, they test only a sample of students in the state at each grade. The use of these proven statistical sampling measures for NAEP should be equally sufficient for state assessments

rather than requiring states to increase their large-scale assessments to grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and once at high school yearly.

Cost

If state standardized testing in reading and mathematics and high-stakes consequences for how schools perform on those tests is a hallmark of the No Child Left Behind Act, states need to develop and maintain quality tests addressing state standards with a high degree of validity and reliability. In addition, these assessments have the greatest impact possible on improving student achievement. To do this well, large-scale assessment involves not just initial development time/cost, but ongoing development and continual adjustments after reviewing technical results of each test administration and reporting results back to schools. This involves extensive staff time at the Department of Public Instruction, and extensive involvement of Wisconsin educators at every phase if it is to be meaningful.

Wisconsin teachers are an integral part of the development of our current test by working on framework development, item selection, reading passage reviews, etc. We want the assessment to reflect what classroom teachers and administrators find most useful in making instructional/curricular decisions. The money has been barely adequate to develop and administer the most basic of tests for all the required grades.

The cost at the state level for implementing high quality reading and mathematics tests exceeds the amount allocated under NCLB. Wisconsin has gone from testing 190,000 students to approximately 450,000 annually through state assessments, with the actual cost of assessing those students in the range of \$29 to \$32 annually, depending on how much of the development cost is calculated into that figure. Averaging the cost of development over a few years, we estimate the range of assessment expenses to be \$10-14 million annually.

To stay within the current allocation of funds for NCLB testing, we will have to make decisions that may affect the quality of state assessments and certainly decrease the potential for enhancing the way state assessments, along with classroom assessments, are used to plan and adjust curriculum to have the greatest impact on improving student achievement.

For assessments to play a meaningful role in driving change, local districts need necessary funds and professional development so they can develop meaningful assessments at the local/classroom level, and to help districts provide better structures for teachers to meet, share results of common assessments, and plan instructional improvements.

State Accountability Systems

Allow states the flexibility to develop their own accountability models based on federal guidelines rather than one prescribed by federal law. The current model prescribed by NCLB is complex, difficult to implement, does not adequately recognize achievement growth, is based solely on two subject areas, is difficult to understand, and creates unrealistic expectations for special populations. English-language learners (ELL) and students with disabilities will have an extremely difficult time meeting the established bars for achievement. Because of the prescriptive nature of NCLB's accountability system, we cannot accurately reflect the particular needs of certain subgroups, and we run the risk of inaccurately measuring schools on standards that are not appropriately measuring the educational progress of these populations. Larger, more diverse, high-poverty schools tend to miss AYP due to multiple evaluations of subgroups meeting cell size (race/ethnicity, economic disadvantage, ELL, students with disabilities).

Allowing states to develop accountability models based on federal guidelines rather than a federal prescription would allow for the development of systems that minimizes the financial burden on states and districts and the detractions from resources going into the classroom. This accountability model would provide states and local school districts ownership and allow them to:

- Go beyond two subject areas and includes a comprehensive look of the school experience.
- Allow for the measurement of other essential skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and interpersonal skills.
- Combine both state and local assessments.
- Provide better recognition of achievement from one year to another through value added or growth models.

- Simplify the accountability model so that it is understood by parents.
- Level the playing field between large, more diverse, high-poverty schools and smaller, less diverse, high-achieving schools.
- Set fair and realistic rules for accountability for special populations, such as children with disabilities.
- Allow for a meaningful definition of schools identified for improvement beyond simply missing one subgroup in one area.

Identification and Sanctions

Modify the requirement that prescribes federal sanctions that a school or district must deploy if they are identified for improvement and allow states to develop sets of consequences/opportunities for schools and districts that are consistent with local control.

Labeling schools as being identified for improvement and then punishing schools by implementing prescribed sanctions reflects a lack of respect for local control. Educators closest to the children, not federal legislation, should make decisions on how to improve performance. Holding schools accountable by a single test score and then sanctioning those schools for not raising those test scores is not an assurance school performance will improve. There is no scientific evidence that the sanctions prescribed under federal law, i.e. intra-district school choice, supplemental educational services, corrective action, and restructuring, will lead to school improvement and improved student learning.

Requiring school districts to spend existing Title I funding on federal sanctions diminishes rather than enhances a school's effort to improve student achievement.

We know what works. NCLB should allow us to implement and support effective programs, such as, quality early learning through four-year-old kindergarten (4K), smaller class sizes, summer school targeted at students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds to increase learning and combat summer loss, and community learning centers (CLCs) as part of before- and after-school programming. It is important to recognize the need to support our schools as they implement effective instructional programming. Removing funding from schools struggling to increase achievement sends the wrong message and proves ineffective.

Overall, changes need to be made to make NCLB more effective and responsive.

Conclusion

Through our New Wisconsin Promise, we will work to close the achievement gap so that all Wisconsin children, regardless of the color of their skin, the languages they speak at home, or the economic or educational level of their parents, have the opportunity to become productive citizens.

When economists speak of investing in human capital, what they really are saying is, we cannot allow our most precious resource, our children, to fall through the cracks. We must meet the social, emotional, and cognitive needs of our children to address many of the adverse effects of economic disadvantage.

By reducing bureaucratic barriers and maximizing public funds among state and community agencies, we can eliminate fragmentation of social services.

By investing in people and education, we can ensure a well-educated, high-skilled workforce as our best asset in competing for high-end jobs. Strong communities with low crime rates, good schools, and a clean environment attract talent and businesses. Investing in education, PK-16, is the best investment we can make to promote economic development and to ensure the long-term economic security of our state.

As James Baldwin wrote, “These are all our children, and we benefit or pay for what they become.”

We must ensure that the next generation who are living in poverty as children become those highly skilled citizens who have the opportunity to achieve economic security.

And, in Wisconsin communities, we understand educational equity and accountability, not because the federal government told us to, but because in Wisconsin we believe what John Dewey said, “Education is not preparation for life—it is life itself.”

We are proud of our commitment to quality public education in Wisconsin. As the NCLB Act is reauthorized in the coming year, it is critical that voices are heard, our voices, our parents and educators voices, our students voices, and the voices of citizens in local communities across our nation. As you know, a federal law is only as strong as the credibility it holds with the public at the local level.

On behalf of the State of Wisconsin, our citizens, our parents, students, and educators, I thank you for listening to our voices and for your valuable work and dedication to improving education across all our states.